

Jaime: Please tell us your name, your job, and where you're living at the moment.

Angel: My name is Angel Enrique Corchado. I am working for Wells VAC as a street light tech. And I live in New Hyde Park in Long Island in a house.

Jaime: What division is that? That you-

Angel: I'm in F division, but I came from manufacturing.

Jaime: Okay. Tell us about your background, Angel: Where you were born; Where your parents are from.

Angel: I was born in Williamsburg ... No. I was born [00:00:30] in Puerto Rico, Ponce, but I grew up ... They brought me two weeks after I was born to Williamsburg. I lived most of all my life in Williamsburg where it was not chic. Where it was a drug infested, hooker, gangster type neighborhood. When I got out of high school, I had two choices. It was either go into a life of crime or go to the military, so I went to the military for three years.

When I came back, it was even worse. It became Scarface town. [00:01:00] So I was in the midst of hanging around ... My friends were all bad guys, but I was still trying to stay out of trouble. But my mother never let go. She would come get me out of South Second in the middle of the night. We were hanging out with all of my gangster friends, and even though I wasn't doing nothing, but you're guilty by association. My mother would come and get me at two o'clock in the morning and tell me come home even though I was 20 years old and I had just came out the military.

I couldn't find a job. It was really, really, really hard times to find a job at that time. [00:01:30] I had a girlfriend and she became pregnant. When she became pregnant, I realized that I needed to change my life. I had been out the military for about a year. I was going to school. I was going to York College, but I wasn't really pushing to do anything. I was just tired of people telling me what to do, so I got lucky that someone connected me with Local 3. I came up to the hall and I asked about a job.

They told me ... They send me to this place called AtLite Lighting. [00:02:00] The owner gave me an interview. He was a funny guy. His name was ... Oh my God, I can't think of his name right now ... Mike, Mike Proman. He was a longtime owner. They owned the company for like 85 years. He was a funny old man. He told me it was a job interview to drive a truck. He told me, "If you take me to the track, you're hired. But just don't tell my son."

So he just-

Setare: To the racetrack?

Angel: To the racetrack, yeah. He was a funny old man. He was funny. [00:02:30] He told me to keep calling. The guy is going to retire in two months. This was in like April, and I went in the end of June and I started in Local 3. I drove a truck for about 17 years. I never ... During that time, no one ever really pushed us or ever told us that we could apply to the apprenticeship program. Or that we could do other stuff for the union hall. There wasn't really [00:03:00] a big push in manufacturing to advance other people. We were obsolete to everyone. We were all worked at different sites. A lot of people didn't go to the meetings. A lot of people didn't talk about the union. It was just we paid dues and stuff.

I started coming to the unions with the steward who brought me in. His name was Thomas Bianci. He was a good guy, but he just, I don't know, maybe he just forgot or failed to mention [00:03:30] that there was opportunities for us there. After I started driving, I came to the company. I told them, "Listen, I'm tired of driving. I need to do something else." Remember, I would make good money as a driver. I'm not gonna tell ...you because I made tons of money. I made very good money as a driver. There was always overtime, so it wasn't that I was looking to ... I wasn't suffering because I was always being compensated with overtime.

But by the 17th year, a corporation had bought us out, and that's when I realized that [00:04:00] there's something wrong here. They started cutting our hours. They started cutting our stuff, so I got more active. As I got more active, Tom Bianci got sick, and I went to work in the office. I started as a foreman in the warehouse. Then he got sick and passed away, and I took over becoming the steward. When I became the steward, I figured I needed to know more knowledge. I had to know more about the union. I had to know about collective bargaining. I had to know about negotiations. I had to ... Cause this is stuff as [00:04:30] a chairman ... Because I also became chairman of manufacturing. This is stuff that I needed to know.

And I had become very close with a business rep, who at that time, wasn't a business rep. He was about to become a business rep, Anthony Esponda, and he inspired me to go to school. So I started going to school with him. We went to Cornell University first and I was paying out of pocket. I didn't ... I didn't start using our tuition reimbursement program. After I went to Cornell for quite a few classes, about six classes, I got a labor [inaudible 00:05:00] from [00:05:00] Cornell University, and then me and Anthony wanted to continue our education so we went to Empire.

I started with Empire and I just finished getting my degree with Empire, my Bachelor's in Science. I also am chairman in manufacturing. I am the President of the 419 Sparring Club. I am on the election board. I am on the bylaws committee. I am on the board for Santiago Iglesias Educational Society Club and [00:05:30] there's something else I do, but I can't remember right now.

Jaime: Angel, you went from driving for many years, working a lot of overtime, and then you made a transition into a more active role in the union-

Angel: Yep.

Jaime: And I can tell, you have so many things that you do, that you couldn't possibly explain all of that within the time, but can you explain one of your roles as a union representative? What are the heaviest responsibilities [00:06:00] or maybe your favorite task?

Angel: It's guiding the people behind me and trying to get the people from ... Especially from our club, it's mixed between different divisions. We have supply division. We have ET. We have J division diggers, J division painters. We have A guys. We have DBM guys, ADM guys. It's a club of all different divisions. [00:06:30] But there's a lot of, in manufacturing and supply, they, I call it "Jenny from the block thinking" because they go home, they go to work back and forth. They think just because they pay the union dues, they are entitled to 50,000 different things. They have no concept of how many people have died, went to jail, like in the Haymarket Trials, how many people [00:07:00] fought for women's rights, for human rights, for worker's rights. They are under the assumption that "well, I pay my monthly dues, so that's what I need to do."

They're not in realization with the world that corporations are after every union member that's left out there and that is because they don't want to pay higher rates for good work. They want cheap work, cheap labor. You get what you pay for. [00:07:30] But to get this concept to people who are making \$12 an hour, it's kind of hard to get them to see the bigger picture. But what they don't understand is that they do have health benefits. Maybe the health benefits aren't as good as some of the other divisions, but they have health benefits. What's the alternative? None?

They have someone to protect them if they work ... Say if they get into trouble for something that they didn't do, there's someone there to protect them. There's a grievance procedure. There's [00:08:00] a steward and there's arbitration to protect them. A lot of these people don't get that concept of there's a bigger picture. It's not just me, me, me. The sad thing about this union and I'm not saying ... This is in every division because it's not just in manufacturing, there's a lot of me's. They don't see ... If you don't educate yourself, if you don't open up a book and get, take a labor history class, or read something about the history. You have no idea [00:08:30] how many people did what they did so we could have all the benefits that we have.

Luckily, my household is all union. My father-in-law's 32BJ and 1199 and retired. My mother-in-law is 32BJ. My brother-in-law's 1199. My wife is a nurse, 1199. My mother's in ... I forgot the government union, she works in Social Security Department. Everybody around me is union so they understand the concept of what's going on, but a lot of these people, the ones that I call "Jenny on the block," they [00:09:00] just want to go home, they want to watch TV, and they want to shut the blinds and forget about what's outside the world because they think that what they do doesn't matter.

One person can change the world, but it's hard to get that across to some of these people. That's one of the hardest things, as a president of the club, as a chairman. It's hard to get these people to see that we need to fight for what we have because little by little, we're losing it, especially with what's going on at Spectrum. These 1,800 workers. If people don't think that this is the floor plan, [00:09:30] this is the floor plan that every cooperation is gonna use forever, and if they don't think they're going to come after their guys, they don't think they're going to come after their supply, if they don't think they're gonna come after manufacturing with this, they're blind to it. And that's one of the hardest things to try to get people to see.

Jaime: Right.

Setare: So what is 32BJ?

Angel: 32BJ is they do like cleaning: housework cleaning and office cleaning and stuff like that. Mostly office cleaning.

Jaime: Office cleaning, I think [00:10:00] they're like the service industry, yeah.

Angel: Service industry, yeah.

Jaime: If I'm not mistaken, but their cleaning covers a broad spectrum of-

Angel: My mother-in-law cleaned offices in 76th and 75th Avenue for like 30 years.

Setare: Do you remember the first day of the job that you're working at now?

Angel: Yeah, I do. I'll never forget it. I crashed three times.

Setare: What?!

Jaime: As a truck driver.

Angel: As a truck driver, I went to the city. I never drove a truck that big in the city and I crashed three times in the first day. [00:10:30] I'll never forget it.

Jaime: So what did you say when you got back to the shop?

Angel: I thought I was fired, but the guy told me, "Just be careful, we need a driver." I was young. I had just turned 20, was gonna be 21 and I was really scared because I was gonna have a baby and I needed health coverage and to find to that at that time, when I joined, they didn't have health coverage. Manufacturing didn't have health coverage for years. I thought, luckily, that my fiance [00:11:00] at the time started working 1199, she wasn't a nurse yet, and her coverage covered the expenses of the baby. Cause I was getting ready to think I had to jump out of a building to pay for this.

Jaime: When you say manufacturing, manufacturing covers what type of work?

Angel: The building of fixtures from metallic fixtures to ... We have a shop [inaudible 00:11:23] that does translite fixtures. We have one of the shops in here that ... What's the name of that shop, [00:11:30] I can't think of the name of the shop right now, but if you go throughout the building, you know the outside lights? All the weird ones that are connected all the way around?

Setare: Yes.

Angel: That was one of our manufacturing shops. Those copper shops, yeah they do that. They do ... We also have switch gear. We have switch gear shops. We used to do transit street light traffic lights [00:12:00] and pedestrian signs, but that of course, like everything else, went over to China. But, it's pretty much, that's pretty much it.

Setare: Tell us a little bit about your coworker. Like, how much do you have interaction during the day with them and how do you navigate that-

Angel: Well me, I get along with everybody. I'm a people person. [00:12:30] I went to a division ... I was in manufacturing for 20 some odd, 20 years. And, one day, I went to a rally at Washington.

I missed the bus by about five minutes and the Assistant Business Manager, Louis Tripp, always says this story, but he leaves a little part out. I called Anthony, he responded to the business rep that I'm the chairman for, and I told him, "Call the bus." He said, "We can't hold the bus." [00:13:00] I told him, "All right, give me the address." They said, "What do you mean give you the address?" "Give me the address, I'll meet you in Washington." They told me, "No, no! Go home," but I already made the commitment, and I had already told my boss that I was going to the rally. My boss told me not a problem. I wasn't gonna go back to work. I was gonna go to the ... So they told me, "No, no, no. Go home." I says, "Give me the address. One way or another I'm going over there." So they gave me the address and I drove over there.

When I got to the rally ... I got there before them actually. [00:13:30] The bus was a little slow. We stood at the rally, we did whatever, and then when I was about to leave at the end of the thing I told Anthony's father, "Listen, I'm heading back. You guys gonna walk around here for a while. The bus don't leave til 4 o'clock." So Anthony said, "Wait a minute, I don't want you to go back alone. I want to go with you." He went and told Assistant Business Manager [inaudible 00:13:53] and Mr. [inaudible 00:13:55] said "You know, that's a good idea. But I can't let you go alone." So they came [00:14:00] back with me in the bus, and Louis [inaudible 00:14:03] was really nice, said "You came on your own." He thought it was a big deal. To me it wasn't a big deal. It was just, I was doing what I was supposed to do and that's it.

He told me ... He asked a couple questions along the way, and I started doing more stuff. He asked me if I would go to J division, and I started working in J division. J division I went through all different types of jobs. I started as a guest washer; I was a painter; I was a digger; [00:14:30] I worked on a backup truck, driving the backup truck on the highway to protect the electrician in front; and then I was a dispatcher. Throughout that

I got training in the company to learn how to fix streetlights and whatever, and that's how I was promoted to the position I have now, streetlight tech, which gives me a Journeyman rate and benefits.

Throughout that, everybody helped me on the way. I got along with everyone. It wasn't where I felt someone [00:15:00] ... They weren't trying to stop me or try to keep teaching me stuff for job security. I never found that in J division. Everyone always was very helpful, and when I got the promotion I got plenty of help in doing electrical work and stuff. I get along with everyone, and I try to convince a lot of these guys during our meetings everyday, especially stuff like inspection strike, to make sure they go out to the rally. [00:15:30] It's just me, I'm always trying to push everybody to try to help. To help us, again my coworkers to donate money, we do lot of charity work. The sparring club does a lot of charity for St. Mary's Hospital for children with special needs, so a lot of coworkers donate money and donate their time and stuff. But I get along with who I work with, coworkers. It's pretty good.

Jaime: Angel, when you say the J division. What type of work does a J division do?

Angel: The J division work is all of [00:16:00] New York City lighting, where there is traffic intersections, putting up poles, putting up poles on the highway, maintaining the streetlights, putting up the new sections. There's diggers who dig the pipes for the electricians to run the wires. There's painters that paint the poles to maintain the poles cleanly. There's guys that go ... I forgot [00:16:30] what they're called. There's guys that work in the boom truck that put in the posts also. I forgot in traffic there's a special crew that, if a PED sign gets knocked down, they gotta go real quick and put up a new PED. Anything that has to do with New York City lighting, we take care of it.

I believe right now there's 340-some odd workers in J division, compared with A rated workers, regular B workers, and A men, cause there's a lot of A men also there. They also do a [00:17:00] lot of work for, say, in the subway tunnel that was just built. Was it the Line 2, was it? They're gonna do work on the L. They do a lot of bridge work with the lights. It's a pretty big division that gets pretty much ... It's pretty good work, and there's no furloughs in it. The only bad thing about being in J division is that you can have [00:17:30] different hours and your hours can be at night, and there's no differential pay or anything for that. So the same hours, the same time. So a lot of people don't like to work in that division. That's the difficulty a lot of A guys, is they're working at night. They don't want to come here because they want to get the double time and the time and half they get for working the Sundays and Saturdays. With the city contract, your hours are whatever your hours are-

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Angel: And your days off are whatever your days are off.

Jaime: Could you tell me a little bit about the relationship between the different divisions, like inter-divisional [00:18:00] relationships. Cause you've seen there's J division, there's A

division, there's some people that are working in different divisions. How do you classify the relationships? What type of relationships are you building?-

Angel: Well in the beginning, when I first started, when I would go to a job site for J division, I would get carded. The first thing that people out of mouths was "What the F?" I don't want to say a bad word but, is "F" for effed-up people or people that [00:18:30] are effed? When you went to union meetings, or whatever, people would always ... If you weren't an A guy, they kind of were like, "Oh well, you're not important." That's the picture I got in the beginning. As time progressed, everybody knows we need each other no matter what.

The big difference I tell you, like I said in night supply manufacturing, it's hard to get those people to understand. Some of them, a lot ... Some of them get it. [00:19:00] I'm not saying all of them. It's in any division, also. There's people in A division that, my son now is a TA-1, and he's working on a job, and my son mentioned Santorini to them. They said, "What's Santorini?"

Jaime: Right.

Angel: That's the educational culture set that we have in Cutchogue[00:19:17]. There's guys that haven't been to a union meeting in twenty years. No matter what part, you're gonna get guys, the naysayers or the people that really don't care. [00:19:30] A division is, I think, more aware of what we're dealing with because they go from job to job, and they see that sometimes we lose jobs to non-union workers and stuff. A lot of the people that are different divisions where they go to the same building, the same time, they're living a sheltered life. They're in a bubble, because they don't see the job loss. They don't see the suffering of a guy who is working for six months in a division and then he's out for six [00:20:00] months. Or he's working for nine months and then he's out for a year.

A lot of them, those that are still working, that we have left in manufacturing supply and stuff like that, or those that work in that type of building, they are in ... Like I said, they are in a bubble cause they don't see the job loss. They don't see the insecurity of you don't know if you're working for six months, you might be lucky and be working for four years. It's like a [inaudible 00:20:22]. We don't know what's gonna happen every two years because there's different contracts every two years. It's just like working down at the A [inaudible 00:20:30]. You don't know what's [00:20:30] gonna happen. You see it differently, but, when you have a secure job and you go there every day, you're like, "Oh, I don't need to go. I got my job. I'll be there tomorrow. It'll be there tomorrow." But they don't understand that they might not be there tomorrow.

We had over 17,000 manufacturing members in the early 80s. Actually, there was more manufacturing members than any electricians. Now we're down to, I would say, maybe 1,200 ... 1,000. [00:21:00] I'm not sure even the number for supply. They're low, too. We used to be a big part of this union, and we've lost ... So many shops have gone overseas, down south of China.

Setare: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What's your favorite job story, on the job?

Angel: On the job story? Good or bad?

Setare: It's up to you.

Angel: I have two. [00:21:30] One is good and one is bad.

Jaime: Tell us the good one.

Angel: The good one ... Well it's not really on-the-job, it's more like the work that I do in the union when I volunteer. When I find somebody a job. When someone's been out for a while, and because of how active I am, I have accessibility to a lot of the business reps and a lot of the leaders at the union hall. [00:22:00] When there is a job opportunity and they turn to you and say, "Do you know someone?" If I can help someone, and I get somebody a job who's been out for a while, I think that's the best one.

I had one guy, I'm not gonna say his name, but who was very depressed and he was in his basement and it looked like he was gonna commit suicide ... He was a guy that I knew from Cooper Lighting, that I knew for years, and I was able to get him an opportunity. He was a very active guy, [00:22:30] wasn't someone to deserve it, but he was just out for a long time and he looked to the point where it looked like he was gonna commit suicide. When I got him, I was able to connect him to get a well-paying job, and he's good now. Now he's married. Now he has a house. Those are my good days.

The bad days are ... I would say the worst day that I had was working on the highway as a backup driver. [00:23:00] This was on the news. A UPS truck hit a FedEx truck. The UPS truck didn't have a trailer, but the FedEx did. When they ... We were on the opposite side. They were going westbound and we were on the eastbound. We were fixing a light ... I was in the backup truck. All the traffic stopped.

I ran over there, it's just me, and I made sure that the UPS guy would stay still. He hurt his back or whatever, and then I ran to the FedEx ... The FedEx truck had crashed, crossed, [00:23:30] stopped against the wall, but had crashed really hard into the wall. When I looked in the cab, all I saw was a sneaker. What I didn't see was that it was still attached to the foot. The driver did not have a seatbelt because he was non-union and he was in a rush ... It was in the papers ... To get to the plant. He had flew out of the side of the windshield. His leg had ripped off. [00:24:00] He ran himself over and was underneath the truck. When I went underneath the truck, I saw him. I ran and I touched to see if he had his pulse, cause I was gonna tie a tourniquet around his leg and try to save the guy, but he was gone.

That was one of the worst days. Cause on the highway you saw a lot of death. You got used to it, but it was never, it doesn't leave you the same ... Especially when you ... It's that it's ironic that it was a union and [00:24:30] non-union truck that got into the accident, and the union guy for, being a 50 year old man, just wanted to get home to his

family, just trying to supply for his family, ended up dying because he needed to get there on time and was in a big rush.

Jaime: I know that you're telling me that you were a truck driver for many years, but now you've been working more with your tools, right?

Angel: [00:25:00] Yeah.

Jaime: And hopefully with partners as well. Have you ever had a tool passed down to you, or have you ever passed down a tool to somebody?

Angel: Yeah. I got a bunch of tools when I started doing street lighting. I was handed a pair of pliers ... Rob Martin ... I don't know if you know Rob Martin.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Angel: He gave me a pair of pliers. This guy named Jim McMillan, he gave me some tools. Who else? Somebody [00:25:30] else gave me some tools, too, I forgot.

Jaime: Did anybody-

Angel: William Burguletta.

Jaime: I'm sorry, can you repeat his name?

Angel: William Burguletta. He's about to retire. Good guy. He used to ... He's been in the union a long time. He's a very good guy. He gave me some tools, too.

Jaime: Is there any specific tool, a specialty tool?

Angel: I think the pliers was the best thing because I'm working with my hands now, and it's something that ... One of the good things about being a streetlight [00:26:00] technician is I go to some areas where it's pitch black. The other night it was nice because this little old lady gave me a hug because I turned on her light. She was so happy, "Oh, I walk my dog. I'm so scared." J division lights up the New York, and, to me, every light that we light up made, to me, it's maybe preventing a crime, or preventing an accident, or preventing someone from tripping and falling. I've gotten this opportunity, which [00:26:30] rarely happens to a lot of people, to get to the position that I have without having to go through the apprenticeship. I take it very seriously, and I do my job as well as I do every job that the [inaudible 00:26:42]. I give it 150% because I don't know all the way.

Setare: How do you think your education at Empire Tech kind of prepared you for the job that you have now?

Angel: It prepared ... From Cornell to Empire, [00:27:00] it prepared me for everything cause there's so much that I'm involved with. It just opened my eyes, especially the labor class

... The first class I took was with Jean Carol. Jean Carol is married to Barbara Kopple. She has two Academy Awards for, one for a documentary on the coal miner strike and another documentary on the canned food strikes in the seventies. He opened up my eyes to see [00:27:30] what ... I got to say it ... What so many people gave so we could have so much. His class was the first class that really made me see that it's a big picture and I need to be a part of it, and I need to get anybody around me to be a part of it. That first labor history class that I took really made [00:28:00] me see that it's not me, it's we. Without a lot of we's, we're not gonna get stuff done.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What does it mean to be a union member to you? And possibly, what is your favorite Local 3 tradition?

Angel: My favorite Local 3 tradition ... And what does it mean to be a union member? [00:28:30] To be part of something bigger than myself, to be with people that ... Like you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. I've come across a lot of very good people in this union that have helped me, and that made me help them, that made me want to be a better unionist.

Being a union member is, [00:29:00] to me was my calling. It's a lifestyle. It becomes your lifestyle. It's not about just paying your dues and having someone procuring jobs for you or having someone to protect you if you mess up or just to have health benefits. It has become a lifestyle to me. It's all I know. It's all I do. It's all I think about, constantly; it's even when I sleep. It's ... My wife gets sick [00:29:30] of it, but it's just ... If there's a conversation in my house, it's something about the union. It drives my wife crazy: "Oh, the union, the union. If it's your family you don't care."

You know what? I don't really know my family. I mean, I have close family between my mother, my sister, and an uncle and an aunt. Everybody else is scattered across the United States. I never really knew them, but these people I'm with every day. I'm with them at work, I'm with them at night, I'm in their weddings ... I [00:30:00] went to Costa Rica for one of the guys weddings. I went to Miami for another guy's wedding. We're in each other's houses. When somebody has a baby we're together in the hospital. When someone dies we're at the funeral. It's just a lifestyle for me now. It's just in my DNA, and now that my son went from DBM and now he's a TA1, it was a proud moment. That was one of the proudest moments, him becoming a TA1, that he wanted to continue and [00:30:30] on ... And now I'm pushing him to be active because he needs to know that he needs to protect what he has.

Setare: What is a TA1?

Angel: TA1 is apprentice.

Jaime: Brand new apprentice. It's a temporary card you get-

Angel: Yes, temporary card. He gets his ... He was in DBM as an apprentice for about 3 or 4 years, but they didn't ... He says that, you know, they didn't have a lot of work. They changed a socket, they changed a fixture here, they changed a light there. Now he's

[00:31:00] pulling 4-inch pipe and pulling wire and coming home and falling asleep because he can't talk. Now he's working hard and it's a nice thing for him to do.

Setare: Has your job ever felt creative, or artistic to you?

Angel: Yeah. When I go to a block and there's ten street lights out and I have to figure out where the power's coming [00:31:30] from and where can I divert some of the power? Why is it out? And if I can get these light lit without having to get a hold of ConEd and stuff. You have to be creative. Sometimes ... Well, when I was in manufacturing, I used to take junction boxes and stuff and make robots for my kids as like weird stuff, and I would bring it home. I would do that out of creativity. I would do that.

Jaime: I [00:32:00] don't want to lose this tradition idea just yet. Think about local traditions. One thing that Journeymen used to do ... I know you're in a different division, but ... One thing is, like today a Journeyman retired. They would call a car service to pick him up at the job and send him home. You know what I mean?

Angel: Yeah.

Jaime: That's one tradition that I admire. If it doesn't come to you right now, [00:32:30] maybe later on in the conversation you will think about it.

Angel: I think when we go to our dinner and dance and they introduce everyone, which they go from chairman to president to business reps to assistant business managers to executive board members to business manager ... I think that's one of the traditions that I like the most because, [00:33:00] not that we're in this for kudo points, or whatever-

Jaime: Right.

Angel: But that people recognize that these are the people that are working hard to continue the legacy that Harry Van Arsdale built. 90% of the people that are called out, that are named, are volunteers other than the business reps and the executive board members. [00:33:30] The chairmen, the executive board doesn't get paid.

Jaime: The examining board.

Angel: The examining board doesn't get paid. The presidents of the club, the chairmen of the club ... I mean the chairmen of the divisions.

Jaime: I think there's only three paid full-time positions.

Angel: On the joint board.

Jaime: Yes.

Angel: The business representatives on joint board is the ... What is it? It's the president and I forgot who else. There's two other people.

Jaime: Financial secretary-

Angel: And the [00:34:00] treasurer. Most of those names are all volunteers, people who are like me that, it's a lifestyle. I love that tradition. It's done at any dinner or dance or any conference or anywhere we go. That's one of my favorite traditions, that even though it's the one clap and I hear the other people's names, it's not really about mine because I try to be as quiet as possible. When they say my name I kind of more like shrink down instead [00:34:30] of stand up, but it's to hear all the other people ... It's not just me. I'm part of a bigger group, and that group is fighting for a bigger group, and that group is fighting for a bigger group. So it's nice to be part of that. That's one of my favorite traditions.

Setare: Have you ever felt you're doing a job that feels that you're a little unsafe, or there are safety issues, or like be careful-?

Angel: [00:35:00] Yeah. We work up in the air near secondaries and even the main. Near the secondaries we need to be 2-3 feet, but the main you need to be 6 feet, but a lot of these streetlight fixtures are not 6 feet from the main. Some of them are closer, and you can hear the humming of the 4,000 - 6,000 volts that are up there. Or if it's misty, [00:35:30] you have to know that you can't be near that light cause, if it arcs, it'll take you. Or when you're up in a bucket, there's a ... Cause we work in buckets, in small trucks with a bucket. You're harnessed, but if you get hit, you're gonna fly out of that bucket.

Setare: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Angel: Working in J division is a very risky job, but we take as many precautions. We wear or PPE, we wear our hardhats, we wear our safety glasses. We cone out the area. Trucks have on lights, [00:36:00] but you never know. When you're working at night, you know, drunk drivers ... When I worked on the highway, you don't know what's going to happen. Working in the division that I'm at is dangerous every night. Criminals at night. You don't know if some crazy kid wants to go in the truck and put the truck into drive while you're up in the air.

Anything can happen, so it's a little risky, but like I said, it's a job and I've been lucky to [00:36:30] get that position and I do the best that I can. I try to work as safe as I can, and I wear all my stuff and just make sure that everyone around me is also safe ... Cause God forbid one of those fixtures fall down or whatever, someone could get hurt.

There's risk. There's quite amount of risk ... We work live. We don't work ... The power's not off when we're working on these fixtures. This straight Con Ed feed and it's 110 but, you [00:37:00] never know ... Sometimes you go to some fixtures and, like a lot of the highway fixtures are 220, you have to be as careful as possible. Sometimes you have to go to the panels and open up the panels and change a fuse. And you need to put on the whole suit and ... There's a lot of risk in J division, but ... Because you're working live. It's not like you're setting up a ... You're running pipe and you're running water, and it's

dead at the time. It's a lot of work, but it's not major risk as long [00:37:30] as you're careful and you're aware.

Jaime: Some of the fittings and some of the equipment for interior work is a lot different than what you guys use out in the field, to my knowledge. Can you express some of the differences between that equipment and how is it better or worse to interact with?

Angel: Inside equipment is, I think, a lot easier to work [00:38:00] with ... Cause see the problem is, we work sometimes with poles ... Like if we have to take down a pole that got hit and there's traffic in it, you're talking you're working in a narrow space of, say, 12 inches, where there's hundreds of wires that you have to pull out and take out. It's hard to get your hand in there and pull them out. Some of these poles have been up 60 years, 50 years. A lot of the infrastructure in New York street lighting, they are upgrading, but there's a lot of [00:38:30] stuff that's old. You still find fixtures that have fuses in them, the old fuses, the glass fuses with the copper in the middle of it.

And then we're working in inconvenient weather, so when it's freezing out there and you're trying to change a fixture, it's a lot different than when you're working indoors or you're working in the high rise. I know a lot about the high rises cause I was always in high rises. When I was driving a truck I was always in those buildings, and I look around and I ask questions. [00:39:00] It's a little simpler, sometimes outside, but when you have to put up a pole and it's freezing and it's raining, it's a lot different. You have to tie in the nuts that are inside the base, so you're always working on your knees. Your back is at risk, your knees are at risk. It's not easy work.

I think one of the hardest jobs in J division, though, [00:39:30] is those that are not electricians, they are diggers. They dig 30, 40 feet, 3 feet wide. They have to make 6 foot holes and pour concrete in them. That's one of the worst ... I think one of the hardest and worst jobs that we have in J division. Cause there's also respiratory problems that can come from the dirt and, excuse me, the dog piss and the cat piss that's been seeping into there for years, and the metal and the dust that's all the way in that ground. [00:40:00] Some of them don't wear that respiratory equipment and it's a dangerous, hazardous job. And while they're digging, also there can be pipes that are not on the plans and they can hit a main. So it's, I think it's one of the riskier jobs also.

Jaime: How much does your average pole weigh? When you have to repair these things, do you have to move them, or-?

Angel: When you have to take down the pole, you use the boom truck. A pole, [00:40:30] I would say, could be maybe 800 pounds, 900 pounds. Unless they're [inaudible 00:40:40] pole, which is those old, big, fat, like a Flatbush. Those could weigh close to 1,800 - 2,000 pounds. Those are some heavy poles.

Jaime: And what kind of techniques do you use for moving these?

Angel: They train use to use the boom and do special knots and safety gear. [00:41:00] You have to secure the area. Usually we have police there when we do it. It's a simple

procedure, but it's a dangerous procedure because, when the pole is not completely in the ground and you're picking it up, it could snap off and go flying. So I have to make sure I have tie-downs and stuff so the pole doesn't go flying and swinging in the air and kill someone or, that's the worst that could happen. But it hasn't happened yet in the last 8 years that I've been working, [00:41:30] but it can, it can happen. People have lost toes and fingers.

Jaime: I want to be sensitive to your time because I know you're going to work, but I do want to ask you one more question, and I think Setare, she wants to ask you more. When you look at older equipment, street lighting equipment ... I know some of it is really beautiful design-wise. When you're removing these heirlooms or something like that, how do you feel? Do you [00:42:00] ever admire the-

Angel: Yes. Well, I'll tell you what. In downtown Manhattan when I was painting, we used to have to scrape the poles. In the Village, like 11th Street, Second Avenue, Third Avenue, people have decorated the streetlights, the poles, with ceramic little tiles all the way up, almost going to 7 or 8 feet. They've actually gotten ... [00:42:30] What is it called ... Protected by the historical society for some of these poles, where we can't change the pole. It's beautiful artwork. It's actually very ... Especially in Bowery Street and Spring Street and it's more on 4th, by Tompkins Square Park, all those poles ... If you go around to all the poles, they have little tiles where artists decorate them, and it's beautiful. I always admired it.

Jaime: So how do you fix those?

Angel: Carefully. [00:43:00] You try not to ... You don't want to disrupt the artwork that people have put into that. You don't want to ... I come from a wife that makes me go to the museum as much as possible, and goes to the Modern Museum, Modern [inaudible 00:43:16] Art. My favorite artist is Basquiat. So I admire these people who do this stuff so I try not to ... If I have to go work at a pole like that, I try to leave it the way [00:43:30] it was in place.

Jaime: So do you feel like an artist when you repair these lights, since it is some type of sculptural representation? Do you feel what's inside those wires and how that lamp works? Does that make you feel artistic at all?

Angel: Yeah. When I get something going and it's been out, and I can't figure out why ... And I don't like leaving it ... and I get it on, it feels like I've done something. I've created something. I continued [00:44:00] something that was already created. I was just another fuse for it, but it's on and I know that whoever lives there is going to be safe. Especially when I did a lot of work in Brooklyn. Brooklyn was very dark, and there was a lot of dangerous corners and stuff. Or like when that little lady hugged me, you know. It feels like you're contributing something.

Setare: Do you feel you're compensated fairly for your job?

Angel: Oh, very well. I have no complaints about [00:44:30] compensation. Sometimes I think I'm being overcompensated, but I'll take it.

Jaime: Why is that feeling ... Where does that feeling come from? What are some of the attributes that make you feel like you're properly compensated?

Angel: I came from a division that I called the "Nine-ninety-nine Special," where a lot of companies for a long time just wanted to hire workers impermanently ... I mean temporarily. Where we had a big fight with this where they wanted to hire workers for \$9.99, [00:45:00] and keep them for thirty days and get rid of them and get some more workers. I came from a division where the biggest raises that we got in one contract, one year, I believe was \$1.25 for three years. I came from, you can say, the low totem pole of one of the divisions and I see the difference, and I see the difference in my health benefits. I see the difference in my lifestyle. I see the difference in what [00:45:30] made me broaden my horizons and go back to school, as was, the more I climbed, the more I saw, the more I needed to know. So, I see the difference.

Some people ... I know coworkers that are electricians, and they came from jobs where they were making \$140,000 a year because it was part of the overtime, and now they're working here and I hear them complain that, "It's not enough. We don't make [00:46:00] enough. We don't make any overtime." But, if you look at the bigger picture, again, they don't see the comps that they're not on furlough, they're not out for six months of the year, they're working ... We work twelve months a year. We're getting six ... If you got over 15 years, you're getting six weeks vacation. You're always working, and you're not on furlough. What's the point if you're going to make \$80,000 in six months and then you're off for six months? [00:46:30] Some guys don't see the big picture. And other guys that are like me or there's other electricians that work with us that are A guys, they're like, "I'm working. I don't got no furlough," and they're happy. It's better to be working straight for twelve months than to be on a job for nine and a job for three weeks and then a job for two weeks.

Jaime: Right.

Angel: They see the bigger picture.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So the only thing ... I have two more quick [00:47:00] questions for you. What advice would you give somebody starting first thing in the business?

Angel: Get involved. Get involved right away. Don't wait until something happens to you to get involved.

Jaime: Get involved with the union or-

Angel: Get involved with a club; get involved with the union; get involved if there's a strike; get involved with picketing. Just get involved. Get involved in the political system, [00:47:30] get involved, you know, our program, the stuff that you guys do. Do something. Don't just take your paycheck and go home.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And what inspires you?

Angel: What inspires me? People that have less than me, and that are still happy and living. Makes me want to work harder in whatever I do, whether it's with the union [00:48:00] or ... My biggest pet project is St. Mary's Hospital. I don't have a child that is ill. I was very lucky that both of my kids are healthy and well, but when I used to see a kid handicapped in the park, or when I saw someone in crutches, or I saw a kid missing a leg, or ... It drove me to reach out [00:48:30] to St. Mary's and start a program that we have with them. We raise money, toys and money, every year for Christmas, and we go with the toys and the money and, we have a clown or a magician, we throw a show every year for Christmas. We do a cancer walk. We do a breast awareness walk. We do an autism walk.

But St. Mary's is our biggest pet peeve project and one of the reasons, [00:49:00] I think is, is that my mother was always helping everyone in the neighborhood. My mother didn't finish college until she ... She went back to school when she was in her forties. So, she's another one that inspired me to go back to school. And, for my house, since my mother had gone to college before and even though she came from ... When my father left she was working at a factory ... She started going to school and was able to get a job as security. My house was like a community center. Everyone [00:49:30] came for my mother to fill out papers for social security, for immigration, for ... My house ... It was community central at my house, so I think that's one of the reasons that stuff rubbed off on me from my mom to give back.

St. Mary's is, it's a hospital that if ... I've taken my children there from the beginning because if you see these kids, most of these kids are handicapped, have [00:50:00] mental disabilities, heart disabilities, lung disabilities. There's one child named Sarah that she's about 4, almost 3 1/2 foot, she's never going to grow. There was this little girl that, the first year we went, she could only move her arm and her head. Her name was, I believe it was Arlene. She could only move her arm and her head, and when the clown came [00:50:30] she screamed out, "You're late!" And she had the biggest heart. The following year she had died. So, I think giving back is one of the most important things that inspires me to push in everything that I do, so that I can have the time to give back to the community.

We do a lot of stuff for the community, too. We help with the street fair, we help ... I'm working on a project right now to try to help a battered women's shelter, but the technical problem is that the women have to be out of the shelter [00:51:00] because they're protected. We have to go there and sign disclosures and stuff like that, but I'm trying to get that all resolved because, you know, you have to give back. That's what inspires me, when I can help people less fortunate than me, because, in all honesty, I've been lucky all my life. I can honestly say I've never had a day of unemployment since I started working in the Local 3. I've never went without, [00:51:30] so I want that for everyone.

Jaime: Thank you, Angel.

Setare: Thanks again.

Angel: No problem, man. For you, anything my brother. You know that.

Jaime: It's good to see you.

Angel: My Paris buddy.

Setare: Thank you so much.

Jaime: All right, I'm gonna shut this off.

Angel: Oh good, there's perfect timing.